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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASMARA 000542

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SUBJECT: THE ERITREANS APPROACH EMBASSY ON DARFUR

REF: ASMARA 522

Classified By: CDA Jennifer A. McIntyre for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Following weeks of backchannel communication, Poloff and Charge met June 19 with Abdallah Jabir, one of the GSE's primary interlocutors on Sudan, and Yemane Ghebrab, Political Chief for the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), at their request to discuss Darfur. Yemane noted the close relationship between the Government of the State of Eritrea (GSE) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and expressed the GSE's wish that Sudan's Government of National Unity (GNU) will assign officially the Darfur portfolio to First Vice President and SPLM leader, Salva Kiir. He also advocated for stronger coordination by the multiple international and regional parties engaged on Darfur in working with the non-signatories, particularly those not currently present in Asmara (SLM/Abdul Wahid; SLM/Abdul Shafi and JEM.) Yemane remained evasive about how the Eritreans envision their role in a UN/AU framework and in a future mediation; however he did emphasize that the GSE views its efforts as falling under the umbrella of a UN/AU initiative. While the GSE continues to evade discussion on many specifics, this conversation appears to be genuine interest on the part of the GSE to develop better coordination with the international community in resolving the issues of Darfur. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Yemane stated that the GSE sees the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) for Southern Sudan as the foundation for any further agreements in Sudan. With the CPA as the linchpin, the GSE wants the SPLM to play a larger role within the GNU. Yemane insinuated that the non-signatories would work better with the SPLM than with the National Congress Party (NCP), despite historical tensions between the Darfurians and the SPLM. Yemane described the current Eritrean efforts as not merely supporting the (recently postponed) SPLM-hosted conference, but more importantly, an initiative to press the GNU to accept Salva Kiir and the SPLM as the lead for Government of Sudan during negotiations on Darfur.

¶3. (C) Yemane also spoke of the need to coordinate the current international efforts, and said) without offering specifics) that the Eritreans see their efforts as falling under the UN/AU umbrella. He and Abdallah both expressed concerns that if too many different actors approached Abdul Wahid, Abdul Shafi and the JEM, these non-signatories may develop an unhelpful sense of self-importance and expand

their already unrealistic demands. The GSE sees a clear need for all intermediaries, including the UN/AU, Eritrea, SPLM, Libya, Chad and the involved NGOs, to coordinate strategy in the "pre-mediation" stage, particularly in dialogue with the non-signatories not currently in Asmara. Abdallah further suggested that with Abdul Wahid being problematic and Abdul Shafi having nearly no military support, a means to include a larger representation of the Fur within a Darfur dialogue should be explored.

¶4. (C) When pressed about the Eritrean vision for a Darfur mediation, specifically venue and GSE role, Yemane dodged offering any details. He claimed such planning was premature at this time and reiterated the need for coordination, with a focus on bringing together the non-signatories to agree on a common platform.

¶5. (C) Comment: Post welcomed the GSE's offer to communicate more directly on issues of Darfur. The GSE clearly has influence with the SPLM and several of the non-signatory leaders, which could prove helpful in moving forward to mediation. By approaching the Embassy after many months of silence, the Eritreans seem to be acknowledging that while they have influence over those non-signatories presently in Asmara, the GSE cannot reach all of the non-signatory parties on their own or through regional partners only. Should we choose to respond to this opening, the USG may have an opportunity to converge GSE efforts on Darfur more transparently with the UN/AU initiative. While post believes the GSE's request for greater coordination on pre-mediation efforts to be sincere, we nonetheless recognize that the GSE continues to hold its cards close to its chest, and in the end, the GSE may hold very different ideas than

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ours about the process of a final mediation. End Comment.
MCINTYRE